



Is this a record? Swildon's Hole to Priddy Green Sink in 10 minutes.

Yes, it's true. This is how long it took us to walk back from Swildon's Hole after completing a gruelling 5½ hour through trip from Priddy Green Sink.

Tim Francis, Paul Craddy and myself decided to do this trip. Paul and I had never done it before and we had heard that it was a 'classic must do trip'. So off we went to Priddy Green. Tangent from the BEC was supposed to be going with us but he bloused out at the last minute. He secured the lid after we descended into the murky darkness.

After descending the entrance ladder we headed downslope not quite overwhelmed by the smell. The descent was easy as it was aided by the cowsh on the walls acting as a lubricant. The general trend of the cave is tight and I required assistance in several places to negotiate the squeezes. Having to carry ropes and harnesses did not help us at all. Carefully avoiding ingesting the cowsh we pushed on through the cave and after much crawling we finally got to the pitches. Tim rigged a pull-through line and the fun started. There are about five pitches in all, mostly free-hanging with the exception of Bladder Pot. This caused us a few problems as the rope got hung up and we could not pull it down. Tim then climbed up the rope to free it. As he was on a rack we changed the order of descent so he came down last on a double line, thus avoiding any problems of entanglement. I now can think of a reason for owning a rack.

Finally we got down to Swildon's Four. This is a glorious bit of streamway which whilst almost devoid of formations has beautifully sculpted rock. There is also life here as Paul discovered when he examined the encrusted rope hanging down. We tramped up the streamway and climbed up into Blue Pencil Passage. We were trying to meet up with the group from Manchester University who rigged the ladder at the 20ft for us. Blue Pencil is a lot longer and tighter than I remember but eventually we popped out at the Double Troubles. This is where we expected to meet with MUSS. The duck was crystal clear and quite full. We spent a while bailing and then pushed on through.

We arrived at the second Trouble to find it muddied. Someone had been here. There was precious little airspace. We later discovered that one of MUSS had come this far and then turned around. We also bailed this duck as I have a history with this particular obstacle and headed off towards Birthday Squeeze. This was passed without event and we reached Swildon's 2 streamway and began the climb out. Sump 1, much to my relief, wasn't silted and, apart from encountering my tacklebag halfway through, passed without any panic. I have lost quite a bit of weight since I last went through and still felt that it was very tight. All that was left was a slow plod out to the surface as we (at least Paul and I) were tired and cold. Finally we emerged into the daylight feeling very satisfied with ourselves. At least we don't have to do that one again.

This is an awesome trip and has something for everyone (especially the masochist). There are tight squeezes, crawls, pitches, formations, walking passage, ducks and sumps. Shame about the Cowsh!

Richard M Carey

2001 MCG CAVING AND SOCIAL CALENDAR

DATE	AREA	EVENT	CONTACT	TELEPHONE
IF FOOT AND MOUTH RESTRICTIONS CONTINUE, THEN THESE EVENTS MAY NOT OCCUR				
13-16th Apr	Mendip	Upper Flood II dig	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
5th May	Mendip	Archaeology walk	Yvonne Rowe	01524 762664
2/3rd Jun	Mendip	Cottage work w/e	Ben Cooper	01256 364199
Jun TBA	Wales	Gower Peninsula	Richard Carey	0117 986 0945
TBA (n/l 292)	Somerset	Castle Cary tunnels	Martin Rowe	01524 762664
Every Weds	Mendip	Mid-week caving	Richard Carey	0117 986 0945

Nordrach Cottage is currently closed due to Foot And Mouth Restrictions

ACCOMMODATION:	Nordrach Cottage, Charterhouse-on-Mendip, Blagdon, Bristol BS40 7XW Tel: 01761 462797 Grid Ref ST51475606 OS 1:50,000 sheet 182		
WEEKLY MEETINGS:	At The Beehive, Egham, Surrey, on Thursdays from 9.00 p.m. At The Hunters Lodge, Somerset, on Tuesdays about 10.00 pm or at the cottage on Wednesdays at 7.00 pm for caving trips.		
COTTAGE FEES per night:	MCG members, members children, SWCC, NPC		£1.50
	Guest clubs and member's guests		£2.50
PREPAYMENT STICKERS:	(Available to members only) 25 nights accommodation		£30.00
ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTION:	Full and Probationary Members: £30.00	Associate Members:	£15.00
RECIPROCAL RIGHTS:	MCG (members only) have reciprocal booking rights with SWCC and NPC NPC bookings via Nic Blundell, tel: 01203 713849 (hm) or 01203 838940 (wk) SWCC bookings via Ian Middleton, tel: 01703 736997 or email ian_m@tcp.co.uk		

THE 2000 - 2001 COMMITTEE:

The 2000/2001 committee continues in post until the AGM is rearranged

Secretary	Tim Francis	Flat 6, 16 Lambert Avenue, Richmond, Surrey, TW9 4QR	Tel: 0181 392 2572 secretary@m-c-g.org.uk
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MCG News:-

There is hardly anything to report since caving and associated activities have come to a halt due to the Foot and Mouth epidemic.

Thanks, however, to Richard Carey who sent in reports on his Wednesday night trips before the Foot and Mouth disease arrived (pages 1 & 5), and Geoff Beale who had already submitted reports on his antipodean showcave visits over the Christmas period (pages 6-8), and a recent trip down Nettlebed chalkmine (pages 9/10).

You should all have received the AGM package which includes the 2001 Agenda, minutes of the AGM held 8.4.00, Officers reports, a statement of the Accounts, and the Custodian Trustees report. Hang on to these as you will need to bring them to the AGM with you when it is eventually resumed.

A new date for the AGM and Dinner will be fixed after the Foot and Mouth disease, and the subsequent quarantine period, has passed. Members will be given notice of the date by postcard in plenty of time. In the meantime, if anyone has any queries they can contact Tim Francis or any committee member (see page 2 for contact numbers).

E-MAIL ADDRESS CHANGE...

...for Wayne Hiscox:-
wayne.hiscox@uk.thalesgroup.com
...and Tim Francis:-
tfrancis@buruk.infrabrck.com
Tel: 0208 782 3142 (until 11th May '01)

MCG newsletter

Because of the foot and mouth epidemic no-one can go caving or walking. As a result, I expect news and articles to be very thin on the ground so this could well be the last newsletter for a while. However, I will still keep members up-to-date with any news that there might be, particularly to do with restrictions imposed on Mendip (walking, caving, cottage use etc.) and I will do this through single-sheet Bulletins. Ed.

SNIPPETS

RESCUE FROM DAREN CILAU, S-WALES

An injured caver trapped underground for over two days has been rescued. Keith Pearson dislocated his shoulder while 3,000 feet into Ogof Daren Cilau cave, near Llangattock, south Powys.

His two colleagues scrambled to the surface to raise the alarm returning with a doctor who spent 24 hours with the 40-year-old until more help came.

Rescuers said the Devon potholer, who has now returned home, was 'remarkably well' considering his ordeal.

BBC Ceefax, 26th February 2001

More news from ex members -

Those of you in the Group during the late 80's / early 90's will remember Lesley Robbins - a very active caver who caved frequently (often more than once a week) in Great Britain, and was a team member on many MCG and other foreign caving expeditions. Lesley was also my Matron of Honour when I married Martin in 1988. It was the first time I saw her in a dress - the second time was in her wedding dress!

♥ Lesley got married to Ian Capstick on 31st March 2000 in Sedburgh, Cumbria, where they live. They are about to move to a bigger house in Kendal as not only does she now have two lovely step-daughters, but she is expecting a baby in the late spring. She looks very well and I'm sure that, with me, you wish her and her new family our very best wishes for the future.

MCG POLO SHIRTS

Don't forget.. you can still order one (or more) of the polo shirts with the new MCG logo (for more info. see N/L 288, p7).



Shops Support Campaign

Nobody can fail to notice the crisis affecting the UK as a result of foot and mouth, and the Government's initiatives from 28th March 2001 concentrate on putting measures into place to help the 'tourist industry'. Our sport is also suffering, in a unique and totally unpredicted way – and the few shops dedicated to supporting our sport are under immediate threat.

Caving across the UK is effectively on hold for the first time in 150 years. Our sport is almost unique in that a small handful of specialist shops supply our needs for everything, and these shops often reply 100% on cavers for business. Run by hard-working cavers like us, rather than some national faceless company, these shops are on the point of closing even as you read this. Many have had to lay off **all their staff** and for some, the banks are starting to push for closure.

The foot and mouth crisis is expected to last into August/November 2001 at the earliest, with the peak of infectivity between now and the end of May. It is unlikely that cavers will regain access to the open fells before the end of the summer. Whilst you may not be able to go underground for a few months, others are losing their livelihoods. We have started a national campaign to persuade individual cavers, and clubs, to keep purchasing from their favourite shops as often as they can.

There are about 6 dedicated caving shops in the UK, which need support the most. We estimate that there are some 15,000 active cavers in the country, so it's not rocket science to see that a small effort by the national caving population can help dramatically. All we ask is that cavers, and their clubs, try to make regular small purchases:

- Cavers – why not replace the tired bits of your SRT kit, helmet, or those old wetsocks? If you're sitting at home bored, why not buy a few books or surveys to pass the time?
- Caving clubs – rope replacement, hangers, lamps or surveys are replaced regularly – why not do it now rather than waiting until the end of the year?

You do not have to *visit* the shops to buy – many have websites or phone orders. The dedicated caving shops that need help the most are listed below - please do what you can.



Bernies, Ingleton
www.berniescafe.co.uk
 tel 015242 41802

Caving Supplies

Caving Supplies, Buxton
www.caving-supplies.co.uk
 tel 01298 71707

Bat Products, Wells,
 Somerset: Tel 01749 676771



Dragon, South Wales
www.dragon-speleo.co.uk
 tel 01639 730 031

More information and daily news updates can be found on our newsdesk page at:
<http://www.caving.org.uk/news/fmd.html>

If you're not hard you shouldn't have come!
Wednesday night.

On the 7th of February Stephen Duckworth, Jacky Gibbons Lee Hawkswell and I went to Nettle Pot. The easy muddy descent reaches a flat out muddy crawl, the mud is warm compared to outside, and after a few tight crawls, and a committing climb down, the mud is left behind and real cave is encountered. Passing underneath an impressive aven a small decorated passage is encountered with an attractive alcove on the right. The way on is a flat out crawl to the left, which gains the Main Chamber. It always amazes me that people will always stand in the highest part until the Boulder of Damocles is pointed out to them hanging precariously above their heads. This is a superb example of hanging death, a large boulder suspended between two others like a nut in a pair of nutcrackers. Given the proximity of the roof to the surface I don't suppose it will be too long before there is yet another entrance to this system. I wouldn't want to be there when it happens. This was the highlight of the trip and a fairly hasty exit was made.

The following Wednesday we decided to go to Cuckoo Cleaves, since it is within easy reach. Once again it was Stephen Duckworth, Jacky Gibbons, Lee Hawkswell and I who climbed into Lee's van and headed off into the night. Not being the greatest of navigators we stopped at the wrong gate and spent some time looking for the entrance in the wrong field. When we finally found the entrance everything went well and we rigged the entrance and descended the cave. We pushed on down the cave, which is remarkably vertical that is to say very little crawling and stopped just the other side of the crawl. We decided not to go any further as the air seemed a bit stale so we exited the cave.

On 21st of February it was left to just Stephen Duckworth and I to go caving, the rest of the crew being otherwise occupied and we decided to visit Swildon's Hole. I know Swildon's very well (it was my 83rd visit) and I chose the most devious route possible. Immediately after the entrance we turned right into the passage that leads to the top of Jacob's Ladder but rather than make a full descent we went into the Long Dry Way as far as the Old Grotto. Then we went up the Short Dry Way and cut through to the Oxbows via Kenny's Link. Through the tight bits in the Oxbows we emerged at the Water Chamber. Climbing down into the Water Chamber we encountered another group who were going to have a look at the pitch so rather than wait for them we climbed up to look at the 40. Then we went to the 20. At the bottom of the 40 we encountered the group again and decided that to give them a bit of time to make their exit we would go up Rolling Thunder. This is a tight crawl with quite a considerable stream and we pushed on until I decided that to continue further would back up the streamway with some unpleasant circumstances. We then made our exit climbing up so that we came across the Well instead of climbing up it. A thoroughly pleasant trip.

Unfortunately as the caving lights go out across the country with the spread of Foot and Mouth there will be no more Wednesday night jaunts in the dark. Hopefully I will have some more to write when I come back from Argentina.

Richard M Carey

SHOW CAVE EXTRAVAGANZA TOUR

You've heard of Anecdotes from Arnside and Fragments from France, now read Antipodean Adventures!

Our big trip over Christmas 2000 was to visit relatives in Australia and New Zealand, and to possibly organise a caving trip or two in Aus and N.Z. Unfortunately when we were packed we could not pare enough weight from our baggage allowance to include any caving gear.

However, armed with some e-mail addresses we set off for Aus in December 2000 to find some sun.

Our first big surprise was to get up-graded to First Class on the flight to Sydney - jammy or what?! We had noticed that there were a number of caving areas in the Blue Mountains (west of Sydney) where there were limestone out-crops in an endless vista of sandstone and bush.

We hired a car with air-con (a must!) and drove west to visit the caves at WOMBEYAN. In the middle of a pleasant green valley with a slow meandering river issuing from a large resurgence portal. This was the exit point for FIG TREE CAVE visited later which was a self guide tour. There were only two members of staff on duty so there was only one show cave open. This cave was WOLONDILLY CAVE.

WOLONDILLY CAVE was situated on the top of a hill and a spirited descent by paths, stairs and iron ladders took you via viewing platforms to the bottom of the cave. This went through a vertical range of several hundred feet to the bottom of the show cave. The limestone at WOMBEYAN had metamorphosed into marble and had then been eroded to form caves and later the stal formations.

Large cavern followed large cavern which were spectacularly well decorated. Huge columns, slender pillars and stalacmites soared upwards to be met by stalactites and banded curtains (shawls in Australian). Helictites festooned the walls. Stunning lighting gave backlit formations clarity and beauty. Most of the stal formations were pure white. Pat and I were the only visitors on this tour with the guide which lasted about two hours.

The following day we woke up to find Kangeroos grazing around our cabin. We went off to tour FIG TREE CAVE which is a self guided tour. The cave was named after the wild fig tree growing above the entrance. Its roots passing down to the cave below. Again the breath taking formations started within 30 feet of the entrance, and continued all the way to the exit. This is a thorough trip to the large resurgence seen the day before. The river flowed through the cave mouth which

was 100 foot high by 40 foot wide. The show cave route ended about 25 feet above the river over a raised gantry foot path.

Large bats flew around the entrance and back into the cave hoovering up the insects that inhabited the large cave portal entrance.

The caves here were very impressive. I took photos in both caves but the camera developed a fault on the second trip and the photos were spoilt. Never mind. I'll just have to go back!

The following day we drove north to visit JENOLAN CAVES. Our route encompassed black top roads and dirt roads. At JENOLAN the road wound down steep hair pin bends down the hill to reach a small valley that was about 200 yards long. In this valley were the buildings and hotel for JENOLAN CAVES. The road continued through the opposite hill which was a part natural cave which had been widened to accept motor traffic in single file.

There are nine separate show caves to explore and we managed to "do" four in the two days we were there. The caves entered were IMPERIAL CAVE, ORIENT CAVE, RIVER CAVE and TEMPLE OF BAAL.

The caves were extremely well lit with back lighting behind giant curtains and stal. The caves were exquisitely well decorated with all forms of stal. The best features that I saw were huge clumps of helictites finger sized and up to 12 inches long, and rimstone pools, all glistening pure white or stained with minerals leached from the bush and rocks above. We were both spellbound with the sheer beauty of the abundant formations.

I visited SHATTER POT in MENDIP last year and wrote in a newsletter that it was possibly the best all round decorated cave that I had seen, but these Australian caves made it seem just like a hole in the ground. Sheer beauty wherever you looked.

The show caves went from the hill top to valley bottom on well lit paths and stairs. The only downside was the 50+ visitors on each trip party.

The following week my nephew took us on a bush walk to visit a gated cave that had genuine Aboriginal artwork inside. It was a large rock shelter 30 foot long and 10 foot high which was gated all its length. It was possible to see the Abo' paintings which were animals, zig-zag stripes and hand prints. It was well worth the hour's walk through the bush to see it. The temperature was 30°C+ and we were able to perfect the Australian salute - known for brushing the hoards of flies from your face and eyes!

After Christmas 2000 we stayed for five days in the Aus' capital - CANBERRA. West of CANBERRA - about 100 miles is WEE JASPER CAVES. There is a small showcave complex here with a choice of two cave tours.

Pat, myself, my niece and her husband went to CAREYS CAVE and were the only people on this tour. We were the last party of the day and were shown around by our guide called Geoff who also took us around the second cave route. This was another very impressive cave with good formations but not on the level of JENOLAN CAVES. On the plus side many formations were stained with minerals leached from the rocks above.



We later flew onto New Zealand where we were able to visit WAITOMO CAVES. These are internationally renowned for the glow worms breeding there. This is only a short cave trip but the exit was interesting as the tour party had to exit on boats on the main river running through the bottom section of the cave. There we were able to pass under hundreds of glow worms on the roof shining like stars on the dark cave roof.

There was another guided show cave about 3km's up the hill called ARANUI CAVE. This cave is spectacularly decorated and is a huge fossil passage boring into the hill, pausing at a barrier that marked the end of the show cave.

A bush walk above the hill containing this cave wound its way through and over gorges with a river that bored its way through the hill. In these gorges, black water rafting and abseiling were trips that could be booked. The black water rafting was a led trip and involved jumping pools and floating through the cave on rubber rings (truck inner tubes). The abseiling trip was a 300 foot free hang with no re-belays. The instructors led small parties with 1/2 hour of instruction technique before letting people have a big dangle.



I brought back lots of information on caving (show caves) for Australia and New Zealand. Adventure caving trips can be booked for JENOLAN (AUS) and WAITOMO (N.Z.). Equipment can be hired but which need to be booked in advance. Videos of JENOLAN and WAITOMO CAVES are now in the library with caving information. See Jean Goddard for details.



NETTLEBED SOUTH OXFORDSHIRE

Regular readers will be aware of a large cavity that appeared in the small village of Nettlebed, South Oxfordshire. This was visited and recorded in NEWSLETTER No 258 dated December 1996.

The entrance that we descended (Tony Botton, Dan Miles and myself) was through a small hole about 4' x 3' where a tree had blown over in the gales of 1996. This small hole led to a pitch of 25' to the top of a large spoil roof collapse cone about 20' high from the floor of a large chamber approximately 90' long, 30' wide and about 15' high.

This chalk had been removed for use in the brick making process, lime mortar and lime wash, and other uses in the large brick and tile workings on the land above. Since the demise of the brickworks the land has reverted to immature woodland, just off the main Henley – Oxford road.

The small entrance had been fenced off with a 30' x 30' high wire fence to prevent unauthorised access by inquisitive children and animals.

With the exceptionally wet winter experienced, this year the right hand section of the mine has collapsed completely leaving access only to the left hand side. This entrance hole is some 30' x 30' almost the size of the fenced off enclosure.

I had been contacted by a firm of consultants to ascertain the extent of the collapse and to investigate whether the underground cavity reached further into Nettlebed where the garden of a new house was developing a large hole.

Graham Old and myself (MCG), Bill Chadwick (Bracknell CC) and two people interested in chalk tunnels and cavities in the Reading area visited the site on 11th March 2001 to photograph, film on video and survey what was left of the mined cavity.

We were able to descend on a 10' ladder which was belayed to a dodgy split tree trunk and was able to walk down a large loose ramp into the left hand workings. The right hand was completely blocked by the roof collapse.

A small bat (type unknown) had taken up residence in the roof.

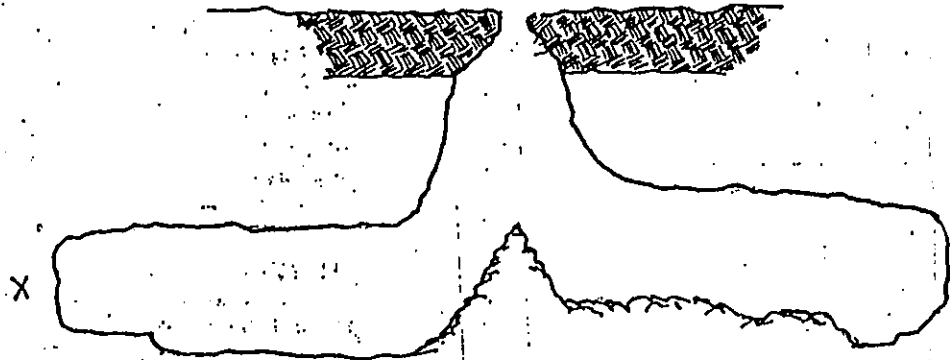
All that remained was a section of passage about 40' long. This was photographed, videoed and surveyed. The collapse in the house in Nettlebed will be investigated at a later date when our team has been invited to examine it.

Watch this space for an update!

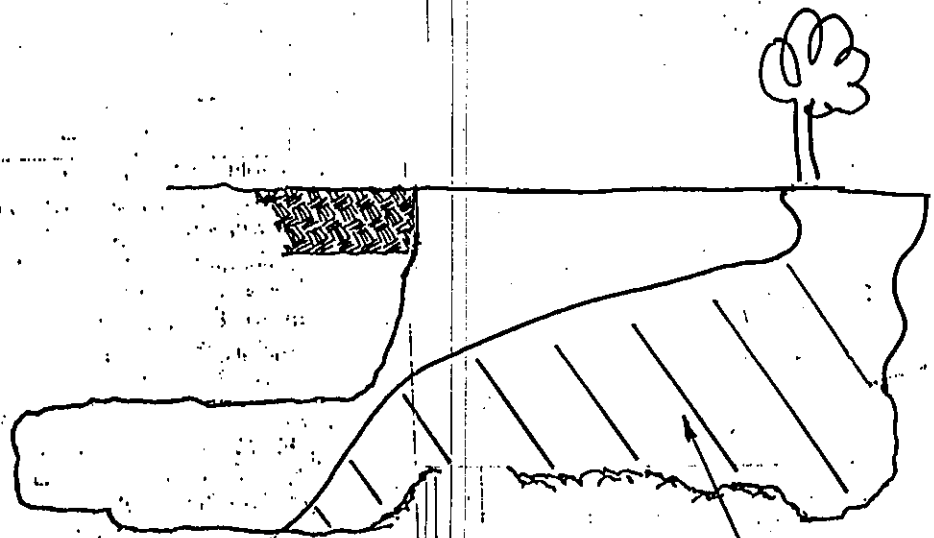
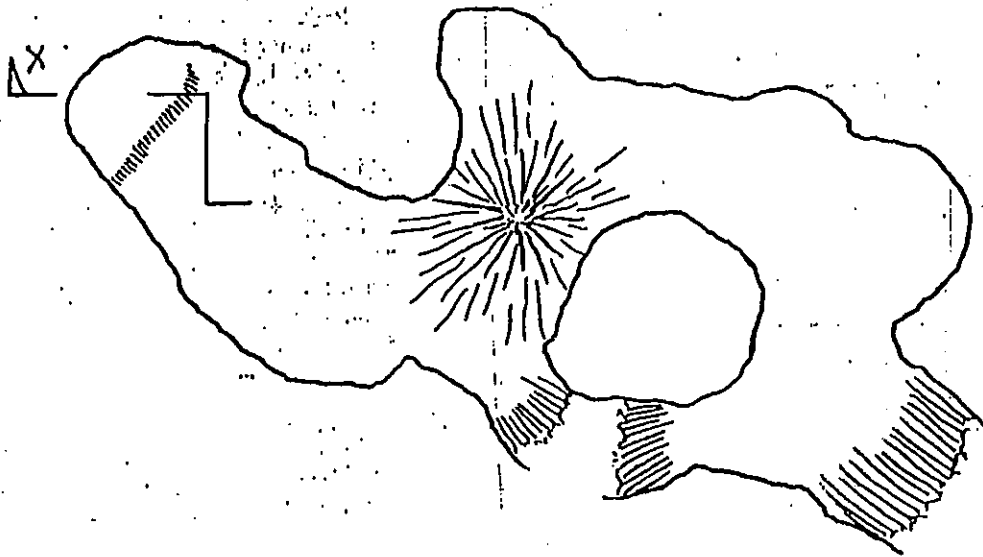
If the Foot & Mouth crisis develops further (mid March 2001) this might be the only chance to go underground apart from our chalk mine at Emmer Green.

Geoff Beale

ORIGINAL SECTION AND
PLAN SEPT 1996.



0 10 20 FEET



0 10 20 FEET

COLLAPSED
AREA
MARCH 2001

